

The Jews of Georgia from  
the outbreak of the American  
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By Leon Hühner.





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# THE JEWS OF GEORGIA FROM THE OUTBREAK OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION TO THE CLOSE OF THE 18TH CENTURY.

BY LEON HÜHNER, A. M., LL. B.

When, in July, 1775, the Georgia Provincial Congress was in session debating on the critical relations between the colonies and the mother country, the Rev. John J. Zubly, then perhaps the most prominent Protestant minister in the colony, preached a sermon before the Congress, in which he rebuked the spirit of submission which had been preached by other divines, who had quoted both the old and new testaments as arguments for bearing their grievances in silence.

In the course of his remarks the Rev. Mr. Zubly gave utterance to the following: "As to the Jewish religion it cannot be charged with favoring despotism. The whole system of that religion is so replete with laws against injustice and oppression; and by one of its express rites it proclaimed liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof."<sup>1</sup>

That statement goes indeed far to explain how it happened that the adherents of Judaism, a race naturally conservative, should have been far more uniformly attached to the cause of liberty during the Revolutionary period than most of the other denominations. It is also interesting to note, that as a general thing the leaders of the congregation were generally the ones who took a most prominent part in the patriot cause.

At the outbreak of the Revolution the Jews in Georgia were few in number, there being in 1771 no more than about forty Jewish families in the colony. Yet these few have left their

<sup>1</sup> "The Law of Liberty," a sermon preached at the opening of the Provincial Congress of Georgia by John J. Zubly, D. D., July, 1775. *American Archives*, 4th Series, Vol. 2, p. 1563.

impress on Georgia's history, and made an enviable record on their country's annals.

It may not be amiss here to briefly review the career of the Jews in the colony before hostilities commenced. In Georgia, Jewish history commences almost contemporaneously with the founding of the colony, for the first Jewish settlers, both the German and Portuguese (who seem to have come independently of each other), arrived in 1733 shortly after Oglethorpe. From the very start, therefore, they shared with their Christian fellow-settlers all the struggles and hardships of pioneers in a strange land.<sup>2</sup>

It was not long before the Jews became an important factor in colonial life; for entirely apart from commercial enterprise, the two great industries to which the trustees looked primarily for success, namely, vine culture and silk culture, were at the start almost exclusively developed by Jewish colonists.

Toleration being general, a spirit of universal brotherhood was fostered, the evidence of which may still be found in the "Union Society," which is still one of the most important charitable organizations in Savannah. This society was founded in 1750 by three men of different creeds, a Protestant, a Catholic, and Benjamin Sheftall, a Jew. The name "Union" was adopted after the first few years of its existence, to emphasize the fact that though its founders belonged to different creeds they were all united on the broad ground of the brotherhood of man.<sup>3</sup> It was but natural, therefore, that

<sup>2</sup> See paper by the present writer on "The Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times."

<sup>3</sup> See "Minutes of the Union Society," Savannah, 1860, p. 126. Also an interesting account given in "Historic and Picturesque Savannah," by Adelaide Wilson, Boston, 1899, pp. 28, 82, etc. Also "Census of the City of Savannah," by Joseph Bancroft, Savannah, 1848, p. 45. Also paper by the present writer on "The Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 10, p. 65, etc.

the Jews in such a colony should take the same warm interest in its welfare as their Christian brethren.

Throughout the entire struggle for independence in Georgia, we meet with scarcely any Jewish loyalists, and one of these had held office under the crown for many years before. This was Moses Nunez, searcher of the Port of Savannah, who appears as Indian Interpreter in 1779, in a list of names of "officers of his Majesty's province."<sup>4</sup>

At the very start, when a spirit of resistance took hold of the patriots, those in Savannah organized what was known as the "Parochial Committee," or as the British termed it, the "Rebel Parochial Committee," which regulated the internal affairs of the town. The chairman of this organization was Mordecai Sheftall, a Jew, the son of the founder of the Union Society of which he was likewise a member. It was as *Chairman of the Rebel Parochial Committee* that Sheftall was persecuted by the British during the war.<sup>5</sup>

In August, 1774, a general meeting was held at Savannah to protest against the blockade of Boston Harbor and taxation without representation. Some of the citizens of Savannah at once got up a dissent from these resolutions, though it by no means follows that they were loyalists. On the contrary, some of them were subsequently numbered among the most distinguished in the patriot cause. They dissented merely because of the arbitrary way in which the former meeting had been held, many districts not having been represented at all.

The dissent closes with these words: "Upon the whole, the world will judge whether the meeting of the 10th inst,

<sup>4</sup> "Georgia Historical Society Collections," Vol. 3, p. 252. Also "Historical Collections of Georgia," compiled from original records and official documents by Rev. George White, M. A., New York, 1855, p. 38, etc. He does not appear to have been an active partisan however.

<sup>5</sup> White's "Historical Collections of Georgia," pp. 98, 104, 105.

held by a few persons in a tavern, with doors shut can with any appearance of truth or decency be called a general meeting of the inhabitants of Georgia. Having given our reason at large, we enter this our public dissent and do earnestly desire that such resolutions may not be taken as the sense of the inhabitants of Georgia." This paper is signed by James Habersham, Noble Jones and other distinguished men. It bears 80 signatures, among them those of Moses Nunez and Joseph Ottolenghe.<sup>6</sup>

After Lexington and Concord, however, the colonists were sufficiently aroused to take sides. The first Provincial Congress met at Savannah July 4, 1775. On that occasion, the President of Congress received and read a resolution adopted by several of the inhabitants of Savannah in June, 1775. After reciting that all peaceful measures ought first to be exhausted, on the ground that the interests of the province are inseparable from the mother country, the resolution concluded "That this province ought and it is hoped will forthwith join the other provinces in every just and legal measure to secure and restore the liberty of all America and for healing the unhappy divisions now subsisting between Great Britain and her colonies."

Among the 35 signatures attached to this resolution are those of J. Lucena and Levi Sheftall, a brother of Mordecai Sheftall.<sup>7</sup>

The patriot cause in Georgia was, however, by no means encouraging. This is best shown by figures. Although at the outbreak of hostilities the colony numbered 20,000 inhabitants, she had but 1000 militia throughout 1775 and 1776 and from 1779 to 1782 the militia numbered but 750, because, as is stated by General Jackson, the State at that time "was

<sup>6</sup> White's "Historical Collections of Georgia," p. 49, etc.

<sup>7</sup> White's "Historical Collections of Georgia," p. 66. See also "A History of Georgia," by Rev. William Bacon Stevens, Philadelphia, 1859, Vol. 2, p. 107.

totally ravaged by the enemy and the citizens of Georgia never quit the field, although compelled to abandon not only their homes but frequently their State.”<sup>8</sup>

In the very beginning of the struggle some Jewish names appear prominently in the Revolutionary line. Most prominent of these beyond doubt was Mordecai Sheftall subsequently Commissary General for South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Besides him we find the following among the Revolutionary officers of the colony, Lieutenant Abraham Seixas,<sup>10</sup> a brother of the Rev. Gershom Seixas, the patriot minister of New York; Cushman Pollock,<sup>11</sup> Sheftall Sheftall,<sup>12</sup> and Lieutenant David Sarzedas<sup>13</sup> who was the son of Abraham Sarzedas and whose mother was Caty Hays, a daughter of Judah Hays of New York.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Statistics of the State of Georgia,” by George White, Savannah, 1849, p. 64. Also “The Life and Services of General Samuel Elbert,” by C. C. Jones, 1887, p. 44, etc.

<sup>9</sup> White’s “Historical Collections of Georgia,” pp. 114, 348, etc. “Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution,” by F. B. Heitman, Washington, 1893, p. 363. “New York Historical Society Collections,” 1879, pp. 260, etc. “Bulletin of the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State,” No. 3 (Washington Papers), pp. 106-7. See also article on Mordecai Sheftall by the present writer in the Baltimore *Jewish Comment* for November 9 and 16, 1900.

<sup>10</sup> White’s “Historical Collections, etc.,” p. 113. White’s “Statistics, etc.,” p. 65. Daly’s “Settlement of Jews in North America,” p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> “New York Historical Society Collections,” 1879, p. 264, etc.

<sup>12</sup> White’s “Historical Collections, etc.,” pp. 113, 114, etc. White’s “Statistics, etc.,” p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Sarzedas was enrolled as a freeman in New York as early as 1753 but removed to Georgia shortly afterward. See paper by the present writer on the “Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times.” Also *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 6, p. 102.

The Savannah Congregation broke up as soon as hostilities commenced and several of its members joined the patriots in the field.

Mordecai Sheftall soon became one of the prominent Revolutionary officers of Georgia. At the very start, he joined the patriots and as we have seen, was well known as Chairman of the Parochial Committee. After the beginning of war, he was appointed Commissary General to the troops of Georgia<sup>15</sup> and in 1777 General Elbert appointed him Commissary to the Continental troops as well.<sup>16</sup>

These duties he must have discharged creditably indeed for in October, 1778, Major-General Howe added to his other offices that of Deputy Commissary of Issues in South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>17</sup> He became a member of the general staff<sup>18</sup> and while unfortunately most of the detail of his service is lost, it is known that in 1778 when the British attacked Savannah his name was not only prominent among the patriot defenders of the city but he appears to have advanced considerable sums to the patriot cause as well.<sup>19</sup>

After the taking of Savannah, he was one of those who were so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of the British.

<sup>15</sup> See Dr. Friedenwald's article on "Jews in the Journal of the Continental Congress," *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 1, p. 86, and references to the Journals of Congress there given. Also "Bulletin of the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State," No. 3 (Washington Papers), pp. 106-7. Also "New York Historical Society Collections," 1879, p. 260, etc.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Also White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 114. Also "Historical Register of Officers, etc.," by F. B. Heitman, p. 363.

<sup>19</sup> "Papers of the Continental Congress," No. 41, Vol. IX, p. 117. Also No. 136, Vol. IV, pp. 411, 591, 643 and 647. "Journal of Congress," Sept. 14, 1780. Compare article by present writer in *Jewish Comment* November 9 and 16, 1900.



It is during his captivity that his intense devotion to the cause of freedom becomes most manifest. He steadfastly resisted all temptation to abandon that cause and preferred to suffer years of hardship than to gain his liberty at the expense of principle.<sup>20</sup>

The British Commander offered a general pardon to all who would return to their allegiance and many special inducements were held out to such individuals.<sup>21</sup> Sheftall, however, remained unshaken in his fidelity, though this served materially to increase the hardships of his captivity.

To quote Stevens' "History of Georgia," "Those who refused to enlist after being alternately threatened and coaxed were put on board ships in the river, crowded together like slaves, terrorized over by every petty officer, stinted in provisions and every necessary of life and treated with savage barbarity so that four or five died every day." "Nor," says Stevens, "was this treatment confined to common soldiers alone. Civilians of standing and property were thrown indiscriminately into these prison ships and, in some instances, officers who had a military right to different treatment were as in the case of Mordecai Sheftall of the Georgia line, and the Reverend Moses Allen, Chaplain, thus immured."<sup>22</sup>

The "Georgia Historical Collections" also mention this patriot prominently as one of those placed on board the prison ships, because of his refusal to enlist in the British Service;<sup>23</sup> although it appears that the proclamation of Commodore Parker had induced a very considerable number of Americans to flock to the royal standard.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 348, etc.

<sup>21</sup> "A History of Georgia," by Rev. William Bacon Stevens, Philadelphia, 1859, Vol. 2, p. 183, etc.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* See also White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 339, etc.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

It was during his captivity no doubt that Sheftall relieved his mind by jotting down the details of his imprisonment in a journal subsequently published under the title "Capture of Mordecai Sheftall, Deputy Commissary of Issues."<sup>25</sup> The writer will pass over the details of this captivity as shown in the journal referred to, as that more fully appears in a paper prepared by him which appeared in the *Jewish Comment*.<sup>26</sup>

The spirit of this patriot prisoner, while on the prison ship, appears from the following entry in his journal: "Captain Stanhope treated me with the most illiberal abuse, and after charging me with having refused to supply the King's ships with provisions and of having shut the church door together with many other ill natured things, ordered me on board the prison ship with my son. I made a point of giving Mr. Stanhope suitable answers to his impudent treatment."<sup>27</sup>

He appears in the language of the old record to have been designated by the British as "a very great rebel"; and was guarded accordingly.<sup>28</sup>

One of his fellow-prisoners on board the ship was Moses Valentonge. This soldier may possibly have been a Jew. The name appears in various forms as Moses Volloton, David Moses Vallotton<sup>29</sup> or Valentonge and again as Valentine. It is quite possible that he was the ancestor of the Valentine family which subsequently gave several prominent men to Jewish Congregations.<sup>30</sup>

These prisoners were taken to the West Indies, where they suffered great hardships and finally they were brought back, as captives, to Sunbury.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> White's Historical Collections, etc., p. 339, etc.

<sup>26</sup> November 9 and 16, 1900.

<sup>27</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," pp. 340-42, 348.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 339, etc.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 340-42. See also early volumes of *Occident*.

<sup>31</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 339, etc. Also "Historic and Picturesque Savannah," by Adelaide Wilson, p. 82, etc.



Among their number were some of the foremost patriots of Georgia, and they seem to have been allowed a certain measure of liberty. At the Lenox Library in New York, there is preserved an original manuscript copy of a document certified by John W. Arthur, Commissioner of Prisoners, dated June 19, 1779, which reads as follows:

We the subscribers being prisoners of War, taken by his Majesty's Troops, hereby engage and promise upon our words of honor, that we shall remain wherever the Commanding Officer of his Majesty's Army in Georgia shall think proper to have us quarter'd and remain within the bounds to us prescribed. And also that We shall not directly or indirectly act and serve against his Majesty and Government until we are properly exchanged either for Officers of the same Rank or on such terms as may be agreed upon whenever a Cartel is fixed upon.

Witness our hands at Savannah this 19th day of June One thousand seven hundred and seventy nine.

Signed Samuel Elbert, B. G. and servt.  
John Habersham Major 1st C. B. Geo.  
Mordecai Sheftall D. C. G. of Issues.

and some forty additional names.<sup>31a</sup>

It has already been mentioned that Mordecai Sheftall was a member of the Union Society. It was with pride that the citizens of Savannah at a later date, pointed to Mordecai Sheftall as the man who preserved the society in the darkest days of the Revolution.

Among his fellow-prisoners, it so happened that there were three others who were members of the society. According to its original rules, any three members could keep up the organization, and this Sheftall and his fellow-prisoners proceeded to do. For three years during their captivity they held their meetings and observed the anniversary of the

<sup>31a</sup> Emmett Collection, No. 7534. In the same collection (No. 7538) is a MS. list of American Officers not exchanged, which contains the names of Brigadier General Elbert Mordecai Sheftall, Dy. Commissary Genl. of Issues, Sheftall Sheftall Asst. Do. and the names of other prominent patriots.

society under a large oak tree. The names of these four patriots have been preserved with respect by their fellow-citizens. They are Mordecai Sheftall, John Martin (dreaded by the British under the name of "Black John from the Northward" and destined subsequently to become Governor of the State of Georgia), John Stirk, who had been a delegate to the first Continental Congress, and Josiah Powell. By these men Sheftall was chosen president.<sup>32</sup>

So highly did the citizens of Savannah at a later date appreciate the preservation of the organization, that when in 1825 General Lafayette, then the guest of the nation, laid the corner-stone of the Pulaski Monument, there was deposited therein, as appears from the "Georgia Historical Collections," "a piece of the oak tree under which in 1779 the charter of the Union Society was preserved and Mordecai Sheftall, then a prisoner of war, elected president."<sup>33</sup>

Again in 1850, at its centennial anniversary, the Society which numbered among its members the Governor and leading men of the State, was presented with a box made from the wood of the same oak and adopted the following resolution:

"The Society will preserve it, as a precious memorial of the patriotism and benevolence of the small but noble band, whose devotion to this Society was only strengthened, and brought into more active exercise by their glorious struggle for their liberty and honor, and by the calamities of captivity."<sup>34</sup>

It must have been by special privilege and while still under parole that Sheftall was permitted in 1780 to attend the

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* See also "Minutes of the Union Society," 1860, pp. 104, 113, 126. Also paper by the present writer in *Jewish Comment*, Baltimore, November 9 and 16, 1900.

<sup>33</sup> White's "Historical Collections of Georgia," p. 310. Under the branches of this same tree, also, Oglethorpe had opened the first lodge of Freemasons in Georgia.

<sup>34</sup> "Minutes of the Union Society," 1860, p. 112.

court-martial of General Howe, to which Mr. Kohler has heretofore called attention. In the course of his defense, General Howe stated, "Mordecai Sheftall is an honest man and from the testimony of such I know I have nothing to fear."<sup>35</sup> Cushman Pollock also figured as a witness in these proceedings.<sup>36</sup>

Besides those already mentioned several decidedly Jewish names appear in the Georgia line though there is nothing to indicate their race. These are Lewis Solomon,<sup>37</sup> Isaac Avera,<sup>38</sup> Captain Wm. Aaron,<sup>39</sup> Joshua Barnett,<sup>40</sup> and Abraham Peavy.<sup>41</sup>

In Jones's life of General Elbert, David Sarzedas is mentioned as Lieutenant of Light Dragoons and as an officer of the general staff.<sup>42</sup> Among other names may be mentioned those of N. Lazarus,<sup>43</sup> Samuel Sampson,<sup>44</sup> Mordecai and Sheftall Sheftall,<sup>45</sup> as officers, and Captain Abraham Simons.<sup>46</sup>

The Minis family also was among the most distinguished and patriotic in the colony. Both William and James Minis fought in the Georgia line<sup>47</sup> and two of the most patriotic

<sup>35</sup> Trial of Major-General Howe, "New York Historical Society Collections," 1879, p. 301, etc.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264, etc.

<sup>37</sup> Smith's "History of Georgia, etc.," p. 629.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 612.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 621.

<sup>42</sup> White's "Statistics, etc.," p. 65. Also "The Life and Services of General Samuel Elbert of Georgia," by Charles C. Jones, 1887, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," pp. 111, 112.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> White's "Statistics, etc.," p. 65, and other authorities heretofore given.

<sup>46</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 682. Of the names last mentioned, only the Sheftalls have been positively identified as Jews.

<sup>47</sup> Smith's "History of Georgia, etc.," pp. 619, 627.

women of the South belonged to the same family. It was Mrs. Minis who brought food for Mordecai Sheftall at the commencement of his captivity<sup>48</sup> and both she and her daughter were conspicuous for their loyalty to the patriot cause. In a language of an old work on Georgia: "Both Mrs. Judy Minis and her mother were great whigs in the Revolutionary War. After Savannah was taken they were confined to their dwelling and were finally ordered to leave the town."<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Judy Minis died in 1826 at the age of 87.<sup>50</sup>

Lieutenant Abraham Seixas seems to have been another prominent officer in the Georgia line, and to have enjoyed the confidence of his superiors. He was frequently sent on dangerous and important missions. Thus in July, 1776, Colonel McIntosh mentions sending Lieutenant Seixas "of our batallion" to General Lee from Georgia to Charleston bearing important information.<sup>51</sup> In the same year we find Archibald Buller writing to Lee mentioning Colonel Seixas as the bearer of information.<sup>52</sup> And in September, 1782, Mr. Pollock is mentioned in a similar connection in the correspondence between Greene and Marion.<sup>53</sup>

Some of the patriot Jews advanced considerable sums to the cause from the start. It has been heretofore pointed out by Dr. Herbert Friedenwald, how in 1778 Congress was considering the report of the Committee on the Treasury and ordered that Philip Minis be paid nearly \$7000 for moneys advanced by him to the acting paymaster of the troops of Virginia and North Carolina in the State of Georgia.<sup>54</sup> Later in the same

<sup>48</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 339, etc.

<sup>49</sup> White's "Statistics, etc.," p. 167. <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> "New York Historical Society Collections," 1872 (Lee Papers, Vol. 2), p. 168. <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>53</sup> R. W. Gibbes, "Documentary History of the American Revolution," p. 227.

<sup>54</sup> "Journal of the Continental Congress," August 29, 1778, and November 7, 1778.

year Congress directed payment of a bill of over \$5000 in favor of Minis and Cohen and another for about \$1300 in favor of Cushman Pollock.<sup>55</sup> Mordecai Sheftall likewise gave financial aid and Mr. Kohler has called attention to the many Congressional documents showing the efforts to recover some of the moneys advanced by him to the American cause.<sup>56</sup> The petitions, documents and reports in this connection are quite numerous and the claim, though favorably reported, seems never to have been repaid,<sup>57</sup> meeting with no better success than the more important claims of Haym Salomon.

It may not be without interest to note here that when the patriots besieged Savannah with the French auxiliaries in October, 1779, it appears that General Lincoln in his plan of attack mentions as one of the rallying places "the Jews burying ground where the reserves will be placed."<sup>58</sup>

I am indebted to Mr. Rosenbach, of Philadelphia, for an interesting note connected with the siege of Savannah and found in Stevens' "Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives," which relates to the landing of the French troops under Count D'Estang in September, 1779.<sup>59</sup>

The document recites that "Mr. Philip Minis, a merchant

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, August 29, 1778.

<sup>56</sup> "Journals of Congress," House, Second, 1st Session, p. 554; Third, 1st Session, pp. 77-78; Fourth, 1st Session, p. 451; Fourth, 2d Session, p. 691; Seventh, 1st Session, pp. 136, 177. Carpenter, "American Senator," Vol. III, p. 449, etc. *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 4, p. 99.

<sup>57</sup> The claims were favorably reported however. See "Papers of the Continental Congress," No. 136, Vol. IV, pp. 411, 591, 643, 647.

<sup>58</sup> "History of Georgia," by Hugh McCall, Savannah, 1816, Vol. 2, p. 266.

<sup>59</sup> B. F. Stevens, "Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives relating to America, 1773-1783, with Descriptions, Editorial Notes, Collations, References and Translations," Vol. XXIII, Nos. 1946-2023, London, 1889-1898.

of Savannah, said to be thoroughly acquainted with the neighborhood of Savannah for a distance of 15 miles, and with all the roads and dwellings, is able to guide any party even through the woods. He says that the house of Mr. Morel at the Bioulay is the best place for landing on account of the facilities for forming any number of troops."

The document also recites "that Mr. Sheftall Levy a native of Savannah is of the same opinion." An extended detail of the plan arranged for the French by these two gentlemen is also set forth.<sup>60</sup>

This interesting French document concludes with the statement that "the two gentlemen Philip Minis and Sheftall Levi will conduct the force of men whenever ordered to do so."<sup>61</sup>

Several Jews also served with the patriots and the French auxiliaries before Savannah. A document is still extant which recites how Major Nones "in the disastrous affair at Savannah shared the hardships of that sanguinary day."<sup>62</sup> The Nones family also possess a testimonial signed by Captain Verdier of Pulaski's staff which contains the following statement: "Benjamin Nones has served as a volunteer in my Company during the campaign of this year, at the siege of Savannah in Georgia. His behavior under fire in all the bloody actions we fought have been marked by the bravery and courage which a military man is expected to show for the liberties of his country and which acts of said Nones gained in his favor the esteem of General Pulaski as well as that of all the officers who witnessed his daring conduct."<sup>63</sup>

It is more than likely, too, that Jacob De Leon, Emanuel

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> See "A Political Document of the Year 1800," by Dr. Cyrus Adler in *Publications of Jewish Historical Society*, No. 1, p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> "The Hebrews in America," by Isaac Markens, p. 127. Also Morais, "Jews of Philadelphia," pp. 25, 26.



and Jacob De La Motta who also served under Pulaski were present at the siege of Savannah.”

In 1780 the British passed their famous disqualifying act which recites, That

“Whereas, a most audacious, wicked and unprovoked rebellion was lately raised and carried on against His Majesty in the Province of Georgia, and several persons concerned therein, in a most violent, hostile and unlawful manner, usurped the government thereof and erected themselves into a pretended, independent State, where they exercised many acts of violence and oppression in contempt of His Majesty; and

“Whereas, the several persons hereinafter named were active and concerned in said unlawful proceedings, the said persons are disqualified from holding office,”<sup>64</sup> etc.

About 150 names appear in the disqualifying act which contains the names of all the most prominent patriots of Georgia. I shall here mention a few of these as they seem to be arranged in order of importance. They are John Houston, Rebel Governor; Lachlin MacIntosh, Rebel General; George Walton, Member of Rebel Congress; Noble Wymberly Jones, Speaker of Rebel Assembly. Near the head of the list is found “Mordecai Sheftall, Chairman of Rebel Parochial Committee,” and further down Levi Sheftall, Philip Jacob Cohen, Sheftall Sheftall, rebel officer; Philip Minis, Cushman Pollock.<sup>65</sup>

At this period the patriot cause seems to have been well nigh lost in Georgia.

In the pension rolls published in 1818 the following apparently Jewish names appear as Revolutionary pensioners:

<sup>64</sup> “The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier & Citizen,” by Hon. Simon Wolf., p. 51. Also Markens’ “Hebrews in America.”

<sup>65</sup> White’s “Historical Collections, etc.,” p. 98, etc.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 102, 104.

David Sarzedas, Lieut. Georgia Continental Line;<sup>67</sup> Joseph Davidson,<sup>68</sup> Levi Philips,<sup>69</sup> Sheftall Sheftall,<sup>70</sup> Wm. Aaron<sup>71</sup> and Joshua Pharaoh.<sup>72</sup>

In 1777 when the first Constitution was adopted, a most narrow view prevailed, the Constitution providing that all persons who were elected to office should be Protestants.<sup>73</sup>

Before proceeding a curious fact must be noted in order to prevent misapprehension in research in Georgia history.

Before Savannah again came into the hands of the Americans and while the Assembly was convened at Augusta it passed a sweeping act of attainder in May, 1782. This act was a most ridiculous performance, for, in their blind zeal to punish those who were hostile to the cause, the Assembly included many of the most prominent patriots in the colony.<sup>74</sup>

To quote Smith's "History of Georgia," "Without giving the accused a hearing and merely because of a rumor that they had not been true to the American cause, many were sentenced to confiscation and banishment."<sup>75</sup>

"Many innocent persons were included in it, and for several years following there were numerous acts passed for the relief of those involved. There were, however, many acts of great hardship and injustice."<sup>76</sup>

One of the provisions of this act was especially severe; it confiscated the property of those mentioned and provided

<sup>67</sup> "Report of the Secretary of War," Washington, 1835, Vol. 13, p. 15. S. C. Pension Roll.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Georgia, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> "The Story of Georgia and the Georgia People," by George Gilman Smith, D. D., Macon, 1900, p. 87.

<sup>74</sup> "The Story of Georgia, etc.," by G. G. Smith, p. 102.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



that "any who shall wilfully or intentionally conceal any part of the personal property hereinbefore confiscated or prevent the commissioners from disposing of the same shall be guilty of a felony and on conviction thereof shall suffer death."<sup>77</sup>

To make this performance all the more ridiculous many of the names had also been proscribed by the British, thus, Sir Patrick Houston and John Martin had been attainted by the British as rebels,<sup>78</sup> and then by this act, as Loyalists.<sup>79</sup>

As Smith says, "The same was true of sundry others, and many of those found on this list aspersed as Tories were found afterward to be leading men in the counsels of the State."<sup>79a</sup> This was certainly true in Martin's case who was dreaded as the enemy of the British and subsequently became Governor of the State. Special acts were passed for the relief of those mentioned.<sup>80</sup>

The act referred to attaints several hundred persons and among these are found the names of Isaac De Leon, and Levi Sheftall;<sup>80a</sup> the latter it will be remembered was the brother of Mordecai Sheftall and had been named in the disqualifying act passed by the British as well.

Both those mentioned, however, may have been in the class referred to by Smith. For in 1785 there appears a special act, passed by the Legislature of Georgia for their relief and Levi Sheftall, Isaac De Lyon and also a David Leion were

<sup>77</sup> "Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia," Savannah, 1802, p. 84.

<sup>78</sup> "The Story of Georgia, etc.," p. 102.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* John Martin subsequently became Governor of the State of Georgia.

<sup>79a</sup> Smith's "The Story of Georgia, etc.," pp. 102, 103.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80a</sup> *Ibid.* See "Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia," 1802, p. 83.

restored to citizenship.<sup>81</sup> In 1787 a second act was passed for the further relief of Levi Sheftall.<sup>82</sup>

By 1782 many of the patriots had gone to Philadelphia then the refuge for those who had incurred the enmity of the British, and among the founders of the "Congregation of the Revolution" as the Philadelphia Congregation may well be styled, may be found a few names of Georgia patriots. These are Abraham Seixas, Cushman Pollak, Mordecai Sheftall, Sheftall Sheftall, Major Nones, and Jacob Cohen.<sup>83</sup>

But these gentlemen seemed to have remained in Philadelphia for a short time only. They returned to Georgia within a year.

After the close of the war the State of Georgia became possessed of considerable land and rewarded with grants many of those who had been faithful to the cause of independence, and had rendered valuable military service.<sup>83a</sup>

Among others so rewarded may be found the names of Lewis Solomon,<sup>83b</sup> N. Lazarus, Samuel Sampson, Mordecai Sheftall, and Sheftall Sheftall.<sup>84</sup>

Just before the treaty of peace was signed many of the Jews returned to their State,<sup>84a</sup> while others came from various parts. By 1786 Jews were again in sufficient numbers to re-establish the Congregation. Philip Minis was chosen Parnass, David N. Cardozo who had served in the South Carolina Line, Levi Sheftall, Cushman Pollak, Joseph Abrahams, Abraham

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103. See also "The Revolutionary Records of the State of Georgia" (Atlanta, 1908), Vol. I, pp. 612, 614, 617.

<sup>83</sup> See Morais, "Jews of Philadelphia." Comp. "Westcott's History of the Test Laws of Pennsylvania," Philadelphia, 1865.

<sup>83a</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 112. Smith's "Story of Georgia, etc.," p. 113.

<sup>83b</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 629.

<sup>84</sup> White's "Historical Collections, etc.," p. 112.

<sup>84a</sup> See article in *Occident*, Vol. 1, p. 486, etc.

De Pas and Emanuel De La Motta were among the prime movers for that purpose,<sup>85</sup> and it is interesting to note that most of those who were foremost in re-establishing the Congregation, had fought for the patriot cause.

Miss Adelaide Wilson in her interesting sketch of Savannah tells us that "Of all the various creeds represented in Savannah, to the Hebrew Congregation alone belongs the honor of having addressed a letter of congratulation to Washington on his accession to the Presidency."<sup>86</sup> This letter together with Washington's reply have been published in the proceedings of this Society and I will therefore refrain from making further mention of them.

In what esteem the Jews were held by their Christian fellow-citizens may be shown by a curious incident occurring in 1790. The grave of the mother of Benjamin Sheftall lay within the woody region of the site of the present Independent Presbyterian Church. In appreciation of the valuable services of Benjamin Sheftall the width of South Broad Street, we are informed, was extended so as to include within its space the unmarked place of burial of his mother.<sup>87</sup> Some of the original settlers of the colony lived, like Oglethorpe, to see the colony an independent commonwealth. Among these may be mentioned Daniel Nunez who died in 1789 and Moses Nunez who died in 1787.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Comp. Markens' "Hebrews in America."

<sup>86</sup> See also "Historic and Picturesque Savannah," p. 95. The latter together with Washington's reply was published in *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 3, p. 88 f.

<sup>87</sup> "Historic and Picturesque Savannah," by Adelaide Wilson, p. 89, etc. It may be interesting to note here that the Jewish Burial Ground was the first to be enclosed within Savannah, a fact which was favorably commented upon and finally influenced the Gentiles of Savannah to make a similar inclosure.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89. See paper by the present writer in *Jewish Comment*, 1901.

In reviewing the history of the Jews of Georgia, we must constantly bear in mind the paucity of their numbers and the prominent positions occupied by them. The Jews of the South generally were heart and soul in the cause of independence and their conduct fully warranted the remarks of Mr. Worthington when, speaking in favor of the Jew Bill in Maryland, in 1828, he stated that "There were many valuable Jewish members, officers principally in the Revolution, from the South chiefly, and these were ever at their post and always foremost in hazardous enterprises."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Address of Mr. Worthington on the Maryland Jew Bill, 1828.

Immediately after the Revolution Georgia had considerable trouble with the Indians and Savannah was much exercised with fears of uprisings among the savages. Lieut. Benjamin Sheftall is prominently mentioned in this connection as commander of the militia for the defense of the town. See "Historic and Picturesque Savannah," pp. 81, 82, etc. (1787-9).





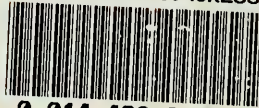








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